



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

IN THE WAKE OF THE IDEAL

BY HELEN SARD HUGHES

I never felt the kiss of love,
Nor maiden's hand in mine.
More bounteous aspects on me beam,
Me mightier transports move and thrill;
So keep I fair thro' faith and prayer
A virgin heart in work and will.

IN this connection we read also Mr. Henry James's comment on one of the Abbey pictures of the grail romance in the Boston Public Library:

"Sir Galahad has become wedded to Blanchefleur, but, sacrificing his earthly love, he leaves her that he may continue the Quest."

Astute psychologist though he usually is, Mr. James sees here only the self-sacrifice of the maiden knight who "renounces finally every human desire" that he may "resume the Quest"—spelled with a capital! But Abbey has seen more. In the picture he shows us Blanchefleur, fair in her wedding robes, the white veil dropping softly about her as she sits, her long dark hair, interwoven with ribbons, in heavy braids over her shoulders, her head slightly bent, her hands folded quietly in her lap, still holding the bridal flowers: the image of sweet submission, an unprotesting sufferer, she does not even turn her head as Galahad, with backward-yearning hand, repels the temptation of her sweet companionship, and, with the light of ascetic ecstasy upon his face, bends toward the door.

The habit has come to us down the centuries—as a part of our medieval heritage—of venerating unreservedly this strength of the pure in heart. We have glorified this faithfulness to a far-off vision, identifying spiritual greatness with this singleness of purpose; we have revered as holy this sacrifice of the so-called lower for the higher, in a re-

nunciation like that of Tennyson's knight. This sort of Pharisaical virtue pleased the moralists of the Victorian period, and we have still gone on canonizing this hero for whom romance has gained its accustomed glory that never was on sea or land.

Yet in terms of the real world, what does this strong ascetic visionary imply? The idealist? The fanatic? The crank? This knight who rides all armed "whate'er betide," is he not often in real life the militant idealist who rides rough-shod over the hopes and fears about him, blinded to the actual by the light of the unattained? Is he not too frequently the Levite who passes by on the other side, not from malice and scorn, perhaps, as we have been taught to believe, but because he too had that habit of musing "on joys that will not cease" which often excludes the consciousness of immediate mortal pain? And as Blancheffleur sits in sad and ineffectual silence, while her knight goes forth to the vision which promises him personal salvation, so many a woman, and not alone in ancient story—stays at her loom while her inspired lord follows the gleam.

This price of the visionary's triumph, vicariously paid, has ever been recorded in literature, with a vividness which reflects one tragic element invariable amid changing times and manners. Sometimes the gleam pursued is a personal ideal, a vision of self-fulfilment. Such was Galahad's in the main. Or the ideal may be a great social vision in which the good of the many is the absorbing object of the idealist's endeavor, leaving him oblivious to the "nameless unremembered acts of kindness and of love." Such idealists of the social vision were the great kings of Celtic romance; Arthur mindful alone of the Table Round, buying his queen by his "great name and his little love" as Morris's Guenevere protests, straining his eyes to perceive the fullness of his great schemes, while

In her high bower the Queen,
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not that she sigh'd.

The sin and the sorrow of Guenevere and of Isolt mark the wake of the preoccupied idealism of King Arthur and King Mark.

Thus in the Medieval romance the militant ideal is the possession of the man, while the woman must bow her head,

and submissively fold her hands or busy them at her loom; or, perchance, she may substitute for such negative suffering the positive pains of sin.

In the day of Elizabeth, the relation of the woman to the masculine ideal changed, partly as a result of political conditions which made the service of the Virgin Queen the object of man's ambition, and partly through the spirit of the Renaissance which set an exalted courtesy as the standard of man's behavior. At this period, then, woman became the object of the Quest, and not a mere incident en route. The Passionate Shepherd was pleading with his Love:

Come live with me and be my love
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods or steepy mountains yield.

And it was the lady who looked beyond, distrusting the fleeting joys he offers, spurning his typical inducements—madrigals and posies, “a gown made of the finest wool,” “coral clasps and amber studs,” and all other promised delights of each May morning—with something of an ascetic's scorn, as she replies:

But could youth last, and love still breed,
Had joys no date, nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

And finally Spenser's exemplary “gentleman or noble person,” fashioned “in virtuous and gentle discipline,” illustrated the ideal of the Time: a type of Holiness, not isolated and self-absorbed, but united with Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Courtesy, and Justice in the service of the Faerie Queene.

Under the Puritans in the seventeenth century, a new type of vision, a spirit of other-worldliness, united men and women to some extent in a common Quest. Yet even then, men were made the chief custodians of the heavenly light, and to the fullness of their fanatic zeal the women of their households were often holy sacrifices. We recall reluctantly the hard fate of the daughters of Milton, the measure of whose day-labor was perhaps more exacting than the light supplied. We must pity a bit the wife of the inspired visionary who wrote “A few sighs from Hell, or the Groans of

a Damned Soul; by that poor and contemptible servant of Jesus Christ, John Bunyan," and who enjoyed the soul satisfaction of Christian martyrdom during twelve industrious years in Bedford Gaol, where he wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, while the faithful wife brought up the four children of his first marriage, and labored loyally for the release of her uncompromising lord. We are reminded of his own pilgrim, described as blessed in his escape from earthly ties and burdens:

So I saw in my Dream, that the Man began to run; now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal life, so he looked not behind him, but fled toward the middle of the Plain.

The early eighteenth century was comfortably immune to dizzy raptures. Absorbed in the miracle of man, the age of Pope found man's bliss

Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
No power of body or of soul to share,
But what his nature and his state can bear.

Writing of these exactly proportioned ideals, the poet speaks of man in a generic sense, yet woman he obviously excludes from even this low plane of vision as he assumes to sum up the utilitarian ideals of the sex in his essay on the "Character of Women":

In men we Various Ruling Passions find;
In women two almost divide the kind;
Those only fix'd, they first or last obey,
The love of Pleasure, or the love of Sway.

But with the rise of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century, the sardonic, masculine rationalism of Pope was forced to give way before a new wave of idealism. The revolutionary interest in the individual, the philosophic interest in self, enlisted gradually both men and women in the army of reformers advancing with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity as the slogan of their Quest.

Early in the nineteenth century we find Shelley writing "Laon and Cyntha," in which, as Mrs. Shelley explains,

He chose for his hero a youth nourished in dreams of liberty. . . . animated throughout by an ardent love of virtue and a resolution to confer the boons of political and intellectual freedom on his fellow-creatures. He created for this youth a woman such as he delighted to imagine—full of enthusiasm for the same objects; and they both, with will unvanquished and the deepest sense of the justice of their cause, met adversity and death.

This poetic vision of the man and woman riding side by side upon the Quest suggests the spiritual companionship of Shelley and Mary Godwin. In "Alastor," in 1815, he depicted the punishment of a "poet's self-centered seclusion." The futile vigil of the enamoured Arab maiden "who watches his nightly sleep, sleepless herself" is here avenged when the eye of the hapless poet, close to death, pursues in hungry loneliness the evening flight of the swan to its mate. Written a year after Shelley had left England with Mary Godwin, this poem seems to celebrate the human companionship which he had found to be the necessary complement of the Quest, companionship such as he celebrated two years later by the dedicatory stanzas "To Mary—" in "The Revolt of Islam," in the eighth of which he says:

No more alone through the world's wilderness,
Although I trod the path of high intent,
I journeyed now; no more companionless,
Where solitude is like despair, I went.

And in the last:

Thou and I,
Sweet Friend, can look from our tranquillity
Like lamps into the world's tempestuous night,
Two tranquil stars, which clouds are passing by
Which wrapt them from the foundering seaman's sight,
That burn from year to year with unextinguished light.

And yet in the wake of this beautiful idea where Shelley and Mary Godwin unite harmoniously in the quest of liberty and truth, lies the tragedy of Harriet Westbrook, and we cannot recall the victory of their idealism without remembering also the sacrifice by which it was achieved.

The novel of the nineteenth century casts increasing emphasis upon this quest of the ideal and the attendant tragedies in its wake. To the scientific mood of the mid-century, ideals of all kinds were dubious and hypothetical. Gradually the Anglo-Saxon faith in that good which should be-

come "the final goal of ill" attempted to solve the problem of the unintelligible world on the one hand, by discrediting the personal ideal, which was held too often to exalt one individual at the cost of social neglect, and on the other, by exalting the social ideal, which should mean, theoretically, the submergence of the one for the sake of the many. And so, in addition to the large number of novels of social reform, we have during the last half of the century a number of psychological novels illuminating this pernicious sacrifice to personal idealism, a sacrifice none the less vicious because righteously conceived by the men of vision. For in these books, the vision is still the man's whether he be Sir Austin Feverel, "an anonymous gentleman" who, in the writing of "The Pilgrim's Script," "gave a bruised heart to the world," and in the formulation of a System, himself irretrievably bruised the heart of his son—"with the laughter of Gods in the background"; whether it be Angel Clare, pure and sternly orthodox, sacrificing the tortured soul of Tess to the cold creed of his fathers; whether it be Alexei Alexandrovitch, paying for the protection of his own calm, self-sufficing virtue with the honor of Anna Karenina as he reflects

that he was not living for this transient life, but for eternity, and that there was peace and love in his heart. But the fact that he had in this transient life made, as it seemed to him, a few trivial mistakes tortured him as though the eternal salvation in which he believed had no existence. But this temptation did not last long, and soon there was re-established once more in Alexei Alexandrovitch's soul the peace and the elevation by virtue of which he could forget what he did not want to remember.

In some cases psychological fiction shows the woman not merely a helpless victim of the ideal, but a voluntary sacrifice to it. In the earlier English novels we find heroines suffering thus deliberately for a conscientious idealism. Such is the protracted sacrifice of Clarissa Harlowe in the middle of the eighteenth century, and of Maggie Tulliver a century later,—the pure in heart who finally forswear the pomps and vanities that they may see God. Then there is the type of woman who is consciously a sacrifice to the social necessities of her class, women such as Thackeray gives us in Ethel Newcome, and such as Mr. Galsworthy presents with deeper implications in *The Patrician*. Here we find again a social idealism dominant, but an ideal now as much

the fêtitish of the woman as the man, bringing in its wake the sacrifice of neighbor and self, regardless of sex.

The last half-century, however, has marked the rise of a new type of self-centered idealism,—a type which has found slight expression in literature as yet. With the extension of opportunities for women in activities more or less remote from the loom and the fireside, there has come the wave of revolt and self-assertion inevitable to the exchange of new ideals for old. In this period of transition we note, then, signs of the woman as the militant visionary and the man the sacrifice, more or less voluntary.

Away back at the beginning of the nineteenth century we feel a hint of the militant woman in Emma, who temporarily forces to her ideals the respectful inhabitants of a provincial village. But Jane Austen was too true a realist to allow one of her sex to maintain for long such supremacy at that early date, and by the close of the volume, the ruling passion of the lady has surrendered pusillanimously to the superiority and calm affection of a country gentleman several years her senior.

In 1879 appeared the first important delineation of the feminine idealist in Ibsen's Nora, the doll-wife who comes to construct an ideal of what she herself would be when adversity pricks the frail bubble of various conventions which she has accepted second-hand. We sympathize with the little wife who has been a victim of mistaken masculine traditions, as she explains:

And you've always been so kind to me. But our house has been nothing but a play-room. Here I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I used to be papa's doll-child. And the children in their turn have been my dolls. I thought it fun when you played with me, just as the children did when I played with them. That has been our marriage, Torwald.

This is not unlike the sacrifice of Guenevere to Arthur in its beginning. But as the possession and power of the ideal shifts to the woman, our sympathy must shift somewhat to the man, for instinctively we feel the inexorable play and counterplay of vision and sacrifice, as the dialogue proceeds:

HELMER. Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

NORA. What do you call my holiest duties?

HELMER. Do you ask that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

NORA. I have other duties equally sacred.

Here is the play of Bunyan's Christian and Christiania reversed.

It is this type of feminine idealist that is developing rapidly to-day in numbers and significance, but the type is too new to have found yet adequate expression in literature. In the work of certain contemporary novelists, as in Mr. Wells's *Ann Veronica*, Mr. Herrick's *Together*, and other pictures of "the Restless Sex," we get the super-woman in embryo; but we must go to real life, or to the more immediate journalistic transcripts of real life, to find the florescence of the type. Then, mindful of mankind's legitimate dread of the unreasoning intoxication that comes with too ardent idealism, we can better understand certain aspects of current humor, displayed in the theater and press. Then we can perceive in the feeble jokes of the "funny page," in the heavy facetiousness of the editorial column, in the crude comedy of the vaudeville skit, deriding the henpecked husband of the public-spirited wife, the neglected offspring of the president of the woman's club, the dyspeptic cookery of the college graduate, half-conscious, blundering efforts to expose the sacrifice we instinctively look for in the wake of the ideal.

HELEN SARD HUGHES.